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MEMORANDUM

Mali's Invitation to Governor Harriman

1. The Malian Government's invitation to Governor Harriman to make an early visit to Bamako appears related to its other efforts in recent months to improve relations with the US. This tactical turn in Mali's foreign policy, which contrasts with Bamako's harsh public criticism of various US actions a year ago, springs essentially from the country's acute economic difficulties. President Keita's regime, realizing that foreseeable Communist aid will not solve Mali's problems and unwilling to meet French terms for a resumption of basic financial support, evidently hopes to obtain significantly increased US assistance. One recent report indicated that the Malians were preparing formally to request specific new US aid. They may view a visit by Governor Harriman as a good occasion for such a pitch.

2. Mali has been taking pains to cultivate the US since last June, when Minister Delegate for Economic Cooperation N'Doure, a relative moderate in Keita's radical regime, led a special mission to Washington seeking PL-480 and direct financial assistance. At that time the US agreed only to provide limited amounts of sorghum and wheat flour under the PL-480 program. The Malian visitors indicated that in the future Bamako would moderate public criticism of the US position on world issues. Since then specific attacks on the US by regime spokesmen and information media have virtually ceased, although they continue to belabor "imperialism" and "neocolonialism" in general terms.

3. Last fall the Malians made further attempts to demonstrate good will toward the US. In September Governor Williams, visiting Bamako in the course of his extensive West African trip, was accorded exceptionally cordial treatment by Keita and other Malian authorities. Early in October N'Doure and Minister of State Kone, the nation's number two man, called at the Department of State to convey another "message of friendship." No request for aid was made on either of these occasions, although Kone

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noted that Mali would be seeking more US help "in view of the closer understanding now achieved." (The visiting Malian officials met with Governor Harriman both in June and October.)

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5. While Keita presumably sees advantages in counterbalancing the extensive--and rival--Soviet and Chinese Communist presence in Mali, there is no evidence that the Bamako regime is now anxious to limit the local activities or influence of either Moscow or Peking. As aid sources, both continue to have powerful advocates among Mali's leaders. As recently as October Keita himself visited Moscow and apparently obtained Soviet agreement in principle to provide capital and technical assistance in numerous fields over a long period. This evidence of a revived Soviet interest in aid to Mali is almost certainly directly related to Moscow's concern over Chinese influence in Mali. Soviet diplomats in Bamako openly admit this concern. Last week there were indications that arrangements were being made for Mali to receive three MIG-17 jet fighters from the USSR during 1966.

6. Peking's aid program in Mali has been extremely well received and is continuing to expand, although with little fanfare. Some 1,300 Chinese personnel are already in the country, and at least 500 more are expected soon when work begins on a new textile mill. Recent reports have indicated that the Chinese are currently providing military training to young Malians under the cover of youth activities and may be asked to train cadres in China for the party militia. Nevertheless, Peking has been unable for some months now to obtain from Mali the sort of propaganda support Mali had earlier provided, most notably when Keita visited the Asian Communist countries in late 1964. This past September Keita reportedly refused to join in a statement on Vietnam proposed by visiting Chinese Foreign

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Minister Chen Yi on the grounds that Mali, because of its economic plight, could no longer afford to adopt public positions offensive to countries which might provide aid.

7. Mali's primary objective in foreign affairs, now more than ever before, is to get help from as many sources as possible without compromising any positions or past actions regarded as fundamental to its "socialist option." The country's economic and financial situation has become critical. Production of cash crops is declining, smuggling and black marketing are on the increase, foreign exchange reserves are virtually gone, imported commodities are in short supply, and the consumer price level is constantly rising. There is no sign, however, that the regime is ready to seek its salvation in a return to the French African franc currency area, as French negotiators reportedly demanded in abortive financial discussions last spring.

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